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ABSTRACT

The study surveyed the 50 states and the District of Columbia to identify current state policies that regulate graduation requirements and to determine how these policies have been applied to programs for high school special education students. Survey results produced four major findings: (1) all but three states have legislation or state board of education policies regulating minimum graduation units; (2) 36 states reported that they have raised academic unit requirements since 1975; (3) most of the states with increased unit requirements reported that these policies are still being phased in, thus indicating that their full implications for special education students are unknown; and (4) 30 states reported having a minimum competency program, 15 of which determined students' exit documents by their scores on a minimum competency test. Implications for special education students include the following: the emphasis on academic subjects stressed content which may not be relevant to some special education students; special education students who complete goals of the Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) may be differentiated from the norm group by a differential diploma or certificate. Such differential diplomas may preclude or negatively affect postsecondary education and employment opportunities. Recommendations for developing state level policies that balance the concerns of appropriate education and equal opportunity are presented. (DB)

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STATE GRADUATION POLICIES AND PROGRAM PRACTICES RELATED TO HIGH SCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS: A NATIONAL STUDY

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November, 1987

National Study of High School Programs
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Table of Contents

Table of Contents i

List of Tables & Figures ii

Acknowledgements iii

Abstract 1

Introduction 3

Related Literature 4
- Graduation Requirements 5
- Graduation Requirements and Special Education. 8
- Transitional Programming 11
- Teacher Preparation 14

Summary 14

Methodology 15
- Subjects 16
- Data Collection Instruments 16
- Data Analysis 18

Results, Discussion, & Recommendations 19
- Section I: Importance of Program Practice 19
- Section II: Description of Program Practices 26

Graduation Policy Options 40
- Policy A 43
- Policy B 45
- Policy C 46
- Policy D 47

Limitations of the Study 49

Recommendations 49
- Graduation Requirements 50
- Policies for Exit Documents 50
- Transitional Programming 52
- Teacher Preparation 53

Concluding Statement 54

References 55

List of Tables and Figures

Table 1:	State Directors' Perceptions of the Importance and Emphasis of State Program Practices	21
Table 2:	Median Importance of Program Practices as Rated by State Directors of Special Education	23
Table 3:	Median Emphases of Program Practices as Rated by State Directors of Special Education	24
Table 4:	Factors Identified by State Directors of Special Education As Influencing the Emphasis Given to State Level Program Practices	25
Figure 1:	English units required for graduation	27
Figure 2:	Math units required for graduation	27
Figure 3:	Science units required for graduation	28
Figure 4:	Social Science units required for graduation	28
Table 5:	Allowances in Meeting Graduation Requirements for Special Education Students	30
Table 6:	State Policies for Exit Documents	32
Table 7:	Policies in States Requiring Minimum Competency Tests	34
Table 8:	State Policies Regulating the Participation of Special Education Students in Minimum Competency Tests	35
Table 9:	State Policies for High School Special Education Teacher Certification	37
Table 10:	State Level Mechanisms for Transitional Services	39
Table 11:	State Incentives for Local Interagency Collaboration for Transitional Services	41

Abstract

The current reformation in secondary level education is considered by many to be having dramatic, broad-based, and far-reaching effects. Among these impacts are changes in graduation requirements and the meaning of a high school diploma. In an effort to improve the quality of public secondary education, many states have increased the number of academic units they require for high school graduation and have developed minimum competency tests as a graduation requirement. Largely ignored, however, is the impact of these reforms on the 12% of the nation's students participating in special education programs. The purpose of this study was to identify current state policies that regulate graduation requirements and to determine how these policies have been applied to programs for high school special education students. A survey was conducted and responses were received from fifty states and the District of Columbia.

Survey results had four major findings relevant to special education: (a) all but three states have legislation or state board of education policies regulating minimum graduation units; (b) thirty-six states reported that they have raised academic unit requirements since l975; this increase suggests that the academic focus of many high schools' curricula has increased in the years since the full implementation of Public Law 94-142; (c) most of the states with increased unit requirements reported that these policies are still being phased in, thus indicating that their full implications for special education students are unknown; and (4) 30 states report having a minimum competency program, 15 of which determine students' exit documents by their scores on a minimum competency test.

Minimum competency testing and changes in graduation requirements affect special education students in several ways. First, the emphasis on academic subjects focuses the curriculum on content which may not be relevant to some special education students' lives. Second, when special education students in some states complete an instructional sequence based on their assessed strengths and weaknesses as detailed on their Individual Educational Plans (IEPs), they may also be differentiated from the norm group by their exit document. These students frequently receive a special

education or modified diploma or certificate, rather than a regular diploma. There are two issues involved. First, while regular education students may complete a variety of educational curricula (e.g., college preparatory, vocational education, basic education), their exit document follows one standard form, the regular diploma. Second, and more importantly, in spite of the differences among these curricula in content and rigor, there are no explicit or implicit value judgments attached to these differences, while special education students in some states are treated differentially--sometimes regardless of the categorical area or level of severity of disability. As a consequence, differential diplomas or certificates awarded to special education students preclude or negatively affect some postsecondary education or employment opportunities. Thus, the value of individualized, appropriate education is diminished and may segregate students from successful transition and full participation opportunities.

In addition to these findings, the survey's respondents identified formal and informal state level mechanisms to facilitate the transition of special education students from school to work and/or to postsecondary programs. Data regarding states' policies for high school special education teacher certification also were collected, and only 13 states reported that they require a separate secondary special education certification. Finally, recommendations for developing state level policies that balance the concerns of appropriate education and equal opportunity are presented.

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Introduction

When the National Commission on Excellence in Education released its report, A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform (l983), the current movement toward excellence in education emerged dramatically into public view. The report mobilized state and local governments and prompted a new array of reforms in an attempt to satisfy the public's demand for improvement in its schools. While many of these reforms targeted teacher accountability, textbook review, or curriculum revision, (USDE, 1984), one of the most widely adopted reforms was a restructuring of graduation requirements for a high school diploma. The educational policies that states have developed to regulate graduation requirements and the resulting diplomas or other exit documents have important implications for students in high school special education programs.

These implications involve the essence of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142), which is a free, appropriate education in the least restrictive environment possible. For many high school special education students, this has meant a mainstreamed program. Increased academic standards and minimum competency, however, tend to narrow the focus of the mainstreamed curriculum, restricting the content to academic subjects that may not be appropriate, in functional terms, for the lives of many special education students.

Yet, in some states, if high school special education students pursue a different but more functional curriculum or individualized standards for high school completion, they receive less than a regular diploma, a result that "for some students .... could mean the loss of particular employment or status in society" (Higgins, 1979, p. 20). If the regular standards are lowered, though, or if special education students are exempt rather than given different curricula or standards to pursue, there is the risk that the diploma will be considered meaningless. Thus, the dilemma acquires the dimensions of a Catch 22 situation.

The issue of graduation requirements is among the variables currently being studied in the National Study of High School Programs for Handicapped Youth in Transition at the University of Kansas. The research group for this project is examining high school special education programs in order to make policy recommendations that address the issues of minimum standards,

equality of opportunity, and appropriate education. The policy recommendations will address attributes of program design, staffing, and implementation that enhance the outcomes of quality high school special education programs.

The purpose of the study presented in this document was to gather and analyze relevant information regarding state policies and program practices for graduation because they clearly impact on high school special education programs. The research questions investigated were:

1. What state polices and program practices related to graduation are important to secondary special education programs and students, and what emphasis have states placed on implementing these policies and practices?
2. What are the current state policies that regulate graduation and diploma status as outcomes of high school, how are these policies applied to special education students, and what are the implications for special education?

Data were gathered by surveying state directors and staff in state departments of special education, examining state policy documents and plans for special education, and interviewing representatives of states that represented varying options in high school graduation requirements and diplomas for special education students. The survey of state directors of special education was conducted to determine perceived importance of selected program practices in relationship to the emphasis placed on implementation of those program practices by the state. Specific policies studied were related to course and unit requirements for graduation, minimum competency requirements and the testing of minimum competence, types of exit documents issued, accommodations in unit requirements and minimum competency program requirements for special education students, and the related areas of teacher preparation and transitional programming.

Related Literature

The current excellence in education movement has resulted in school reforms that are intended to improve the quality of education in our nation's secondary schools. The current transition from school to adult life

movement has resulted in school program modifications that are intended to improve educational programming for high school youth who are handicapped. A review of literature related to educational reforms and a concurrent review of recent trends in high school programming for special education students indicates that the two movements are not always compatible. Increased graduation requirements have implications for the provision of an appropriate education for high school special education students, the potential for discriminatory practices, and have special significance for the preparation of high school special education teachers.

Graduation Requirements

The changes in graduation requirements through history parallel changes in the role of high schools. Prior to graduation requirements as we know them today, early high schools had only state laws regarding compulsory attendance. Compulsory attendance laws were passed to ensure that students had sufficient time to learn, to prevent their exploitation in the labor force, and to preserve full-time jobs for adults. In time, literacy became a dominant goal of high schools and overshadowed the goals of socialization and education in citizenship. This emphasis on literacy was fostered by colleges to ensure that students would be prepared for college work. Organizing the coursework around literacy led to age-graded, sequenced requirements for earning a high school diploma. Thus, socialization as an educational goal was subordinated to the goal of academic competence (Higgins, 1979). The Carnegie unit, or some variation of it, was instituted by most schools as a means of assessing the amount of time, usually in hours and minutes, that students spent in instruction for various subjects. Even though these units were based on satisfactory completion of the courses, there was no standardization of expectations related to a minimum level of student performance (Collins, 1979).

In addition to Carnegie units, many states in recent years have initiated minimum competency requirements for graduation. Minimum competence, however, should not be confused with competency-based instruction. The competency-based system of instruction uses specified competencies as the standard for passing or failing a class, rather than a standard of a specified amount of instructional time, as in the time-based system (Ferqueron, 1984). As opposed to the teacher-developed standards, the competency-based

approach establishes competencies externally, or outside of the classroom. All students are required to achieve these competencies, regardless of which teachers they have. Ferqueron distinguishes between the two systems, saying:

> Suppose the same content is to be taught both by the time-based and the competency-based methods. The content, thus, is fixed in both. Beyond that, however, the constants and variables are exactly opposite. In the traditional system, time is fixed but student proficiency is variable. In the competency-based system, student proficiency is fixed but time is variable (p. 7).

Rather than adopt a strictly competency-based system, however, most states have incorporated student minimum competencies into the traditional time-based system. As a result, these states have addressed the problems of how to validate competencies, how to assess students' attainment of the competencies, assign letter-grades to the achievement of competencies, and assure that graduating students meet the required competencies within the time-based, credit/unit system (Ferqueron, 1984). Blackhurst (1977) asserts that this is an incompatible compromise for a true competency-based instructional system.

State Legislation. Historically, the school curriculum has been decided by local Boards of Education. However, as pointed out by Doyle and Hartle (1985), the leadership in the recent reform movement has come from state government officials, rather than educators or the federal government. The result has been a wide array of state legislation aimed at improving the school curriculum by raising graduation requirements and instituting minimum competency testing programs.

Killian (1985) cited Texas as one state that has gone one step further than merely setting graduation requirements and has passed legislation that revokes the autonomy of local school districts in deciding what constitutes a well balanced curriculum. The state now requires a statewide competency test and an increased number of credits for graduation from high school. Additionally, the coursework content is specified through essential elements

as part of a statewide curriculum, and promotion of students is based on mastery of the competencies. The intent of House Bill 246 in Texas, according to Killian, was to regulate both curriculum and standards, thus bringing about higher student achievement, a factor considered to be important in eliminating inequality of educational opportunity.

Evans (1985) investigated the potential impact of similar California legislation on the curriculum of that state. Evans asked 42 high school principals to rate the degree of impact of minimum competency testing on seven specific areas, including credit requirements for graduation, course sequence in English, number of writing courses offered, number of writing sections available, the course of study in writing, and staff development activities related to the teaching of writing.

Findings of the Evans (1985) study indicated that there have been increases in each of these areas, all of which relate to minimum competencies taught. Principals who were questioned in follow-up interviews indicated that the desire to emphasize academic accountability was the major impetus for increased requirements, and "the desire for academic accountability is commonly seen as one of the motivations for mandating minimum competency testing in California and elsewhere" (Evans, 1985, p. 502). Thus, Evans concluded that these increases are related to the legislation mandating minimum competency testing and predicts that minimum competency legislation will affect the curriculum in reading, writing, and mathematics in other states as well. Further, Evans inferred that current legislation in California that proposes to regulate the curriculum would influence school programs and priorities leading to graduation, as did minimum competency legislation.

In summary, while the high school curriculum originally aimed to provide socialization opportunities, the growing emphasis on literacy came to be reflected in the academic emphasis of graduation requirements. The curriculum became even more focused on academics with the initiation of minimum competency testing and increased Carnegie units for graduation. It appears that this academic focus is now being extended to a standardized curriculum, as exemplified by at least two populous and often pace-setting states that have adopted statewide curriculum legislation.

Graduation Requirements and Special Education

Graduation requirements for special education students involve both philosophical viewpoints and realities of current school policies and practices. These need to be addressed at this point to set the stage for the project research design and subsequent interpretation of findings.

Equal opportunity and appropriate education. An important reason for the intervention of the federal government into public education has been the provision of equal educational opportunity for vulnerable minority groups. The application of this principle was emphasized in the Brown v. Board of Education decision in 1954 and was furthered for students with disabilities by the passage of a series of legislation that culminated with The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142). Among other important accomplishments, PL 94-142 helped abolish a dual system of educating handicapped and nonhandicapped students that had been brought about by exclusion, misclassification, inappropriate education, restrictive placements, lack of procedural due process, and lack of parental involvement (Turnbull, et al., 1983).

The principle of equal opportunity has been important in ensuring that students with disabilities will have access to regular education resources through the regular curriculum. Yet, encouraging special education students to pursue the rigorous, academic standards of the regular curriculum may mean that many are not receiving an education that is relevant to their needs.

The dilemma is furthered by the practice of issuing differentiated diplomas to special education students who are involved in an education program that is different from regular education, even though it may be more appropriate for them. The rights affirmed by PL 94-142 and other federal legislation become vulnerable as states develop educational reforms that may force some special education students to choose between an appropriate education signified by a different diploma, or a more inappropriate program that leads to the desired regular diploma.

Clark (1980) maintains that individualized education can be a method of achieving appropriate education for special education students and stresses that true individualization must extend beyond instructional approach or

methodology, to what is taught. When special education students are placed in a high school curriculum, the appropriateness of that curriculum needs to be judged in terms of its ability to prepare them for their lives after they leave school. Clark cautions:

> For whatever reasons, educators have too frequently lost sight of personal outcomes in designing high school curricula and organizing high school programs. As handicapped adolescents are increasingly being identified and scheduled into regular high school programs, we must challenge the appropriateness of their content and their delivery. If the challenge is satisfied, we can proceed; if not, there is little justification for the continuation of current practices (p. 17).

Minimum competency tests. Probably the most controversial of all educational reforms in the wake of the many task forces on educational reform has been the use of minimum competency tests for determining graduation policies. The assessment of student competencies is an issue that has dominated the literature. At the heart of the controversy is the belief that mastery of basic academic skills should indicate a graduate's preparedness for community life, as opposed to mastery of life skills, or the ability to function in the community (Schenck, 1981). The controversy over the validity of the competencies chosen for a program is important also in the issue of equal treatment of special education students. At this point in time, the issue of minimum standards for youth labeled educationally handicapped is unresolved, although state and local education agencies all have policies related to graduation for non-handicapped students.

Diploma policies. The results of a recent Gallup Poll (Gallup, 1986) indicate that the high school diploma is still an important document to Americans. It may even be more important to students in special education. Advocates have fought to include special education students in those programs that lead to a high school diploma. "For handicapped students, education has always been valuable and the attainment of a high school diploma was considered the Omega of a long, frustrating fight to share in the birthright of their non-handicapped peers" (Higgins, 1979, p. 12). The diploma is identified in the literature as being:

> . . .that document which is awarded for satisfactory completion of all graduation requirements, both state and local. They may include (1) any and all competency tests mandated, (2) required courses and number of Carnegie units and (3) number of school days attended as required by law (Higgins, 1979, p. 12).

McClung and Pullin (1978) outlined three basic options for applying diploma policy to special education students: "(1) same diploma and same standards, (2) same diploma and differentiated standards, (3) differentiated diploma and differentiated standards" (p. 924). Higgins (1979) and Ross and Weintraub (1980) identified different approaches used by states in implementing these policy options. These approaches include awarding the same diploma to all students who meet regular standards, a special diploma to special education students who have individualized standards specified in their IEPs or who pursue standards based on a different curriculum, and a certificate to special education students who meet some, but not all, of the regular graduation requirements.

The Policy Research Center (1980) has identified the practice of awarding diplomas to special education students as being particularly open to litigation. The controversy revolves mainly around the possibility of discriminating practices that can affect any group of students that is singled out for different treatment. Issues that are particularly litigious include:

1. The potential for discriminatory tracking systems.
2. Conflicts between state statutes and federal laws.
3. Due process and equal protection.
4. Property rights, e.g., high school diploma.

The authors contend that inconsistencies in policies that apply graduation requirements to special education students may lead to discriminatory practices. Policy makers are challenged to develop flexible policies that meet the concerns of the public and yet allow for individual differences.

In summary, the issues regarding graduation diplomas and requirements are, as yet, not clearly defined. Historically, the diploma has signified a variety of fairly explicit outcomes: (a) instructional time requirements

fulfilled; (b) socialization and citizenship achieved; (c) literacy skills taught; (d) required credits or curricular units attained; and (e) student competency in specified subject areas. Similarly, the accomplishment of program completion has signalled some implicit outcomes: (a) the graduate can participate independently in society; (b) the graduate is prepared for a vocational or occupational role; and (c) the graduate is prepared for postsecondary instruction. Quite apparently, these two alternative sets of outcomes, the first set of which might be thought of as "means" and the second set as "ends", are uncorrelated and lack causal linkage. There is an unknown relationship between the requirements for a diploma and the proficiency with which one might accomplish independent living, occupational adequacy, preparedness for postsecondary education. Clearly, the revisions in curricular and program offerings available to high school students guarantee continued confusion and inequities. The standards for graduation and opportunities following graduation lack comparability within and across states and may penalize some students who move from one community to another.

Transitional Programming

A great deal of attention within the past few years has been given to the question of whether the outcomes of high school educational programs, including those of special education, are adequately preparing disabled youth for their adult lives. Part of this questioning arises from the issues of minimum competency standards, but much of it comes directly out of a concern with the adult status of persons with disabilities. Madeline Will (1984) has cited the high rate of unemployment among the nation's disabled population as being an appropriate concern for the federal government. "Approximately one school generation after guaranteeing the right to a free appropriate public education for all children with handicaps, it is appropriate that. . .[Congress] address the transition of persons with disabilities from school to working life" (Will, 1984, p. 1). Thus, the development of transition assistance at the federal level can be viewed as an extension of the significant investment the country has made in special education. It is a welcome initiative but poses another point of tension between state initiatives for academic excellence and federal initiatives for appropriate educational and transitional programming.

Will (1984) focuses on employment as the primary indicator of the degree of success in transition. "The final assumption is that sustained employment represents an important outcome of education and transition for all Americans" (Will, 1984. p. 3). The employment of students with disabilities, thus, becomes a significant measure of the degree to which special education programs are successful in normalizing the lives of its students. The basis of Will's policy initiative is that integrated work settings, access to the community resources available to other workers, and broadened social contacts result from integrated employment opportunities for special education students through transitional assistance.

Halpern (1985) called for a revision of the model that Will (1984) proposed, one that would not imply that success in employment is generalized to success in other life areas. Halpern studied clients in four states and found that there appears to be little correlation between success in one area, such as employment, and success in other areas, such as residential environment, independent living status, and social relationships. Thus, the inclusion of these latter areas as goals for high school special education programs should be an important consideration in establishing the appropriateness of a transition program.

The Halpern (1985) study also focused on the related concern of interagency linkages between and among schools and agencies in the adult service delivery system. Although entry into these services was probably indicated for many special education students, knowledge of the adult programs was lacking among students and parents. Additionally, administrators and teachers indicated that adult agencies were seldom involved in transition services, and few formal or informal interagency agreements were identified. Thus, Halpern questioned whether those students, whose outcome goals included transition into the community's adult services, were receiving an appropriate program.

Transitional services. One method of programming for the transition of special education students from high school to adult life is through providing support services. Since the adult service delivery system consists of a number of independent agencies, such as Vocational Rehabilitation and Vocational Education, interagency cooperation becomes important. The U.S.

Department of Education (1985) has identified three different planning categories of interagency efforts. They are:

> (a) state level cooperative agreements followed by statewide training, local agreements and the development of local cooperative programs; (b) state-initiated pilot projects leading to program expansion, local agreements and sometimes state level agreements; and (c) the development of cooperative programs through local initiative (p. 1).

Among the recommendations for planning are career education experiences, cross-agency staff inservice training, and state level coordinating committees.

Transitional skills instruction. Besides providing services to assist special education students in making the transition from school to adult life, it is important that schools teach students the actual skills that will enable them to function successfully in the community. D'Alonzo and Owen (1985) surveyed the five project categories that the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services has funded for transition projects. They synthesized the results of this survey into a description of the best practices being conducted to assist students in making a successful transition into the community. These authors contend that, "Generalizable academic skills, social skills, communication skills, and reasoning skills training should be incorporated into the transition process if we expect the individual to function successfully within the community" (p. 25).

In summary, transition programming in public school programs has been supported and guided both by federal initiatives and independent research data. Both are, in effect, efforts to reform current educational program practices in high schools serving students with handicaps and special needs. They both speak to the issue of relevancy, appropriateness, and functionality. They both speak to educational outcomes that are "ends" rather than "means" to ends. The result is, of course, a conflict between academic excellence through state reforms and appropriate education through federal policy initiatives.

Teacher Preparation

One of the reforms most widely adopted by states in order to upgrade education has been aimed at teacher preparation. Not only are teacher certification standards being raised in many states, but the U. S. Department of Education reported in The Nation Responds (1984) that inservice requirements are being instituted also. Additionally, incentives to encourage teachers to perform well or to learn new skills have become more common (Pipho, 1986).

High school special education teachers are affected not only by these increased requirements for teacher preparation in general, but also by issues related to the debate over the appropriate outcomes for high school special education students. Clark (1984) reviewed the issues in secondary teacher preparation for special educators, giving particular attention to "elementary vs. secondary education, differentiation of secondary roles, concerns for quantity and quality, specialized categorical programming, and interdisciplinary training" (p. 170). Among other recommendations, Clark advocated that every state offer at least one program to train secondary special education personnel, and that differentiated certification reflect the different training needs of secondary teachers.

The relationship between current policies and program practices in high school special education efforts and secondary special education personnel preparation is obvious enough. However, it is virtually ignored by federal and state education policy makers and deans of colleges of education, thus contributing to the dilemma.

Summary

In conclusion, the field of special education appears to be facing decisions involving particularly sensitive issues. Increased emphasis by state and local governments on the quality of education has resulted in more rigorous standards for graduation. Since these standards have been concentrated in academic content for the most part, special education students have required accommodations or other modifications in general policies for granting diplomas. While many of the rights gained through the Education for All Handicapped Children Act would appear to favor requiring

special education students to meet the same opportunities and standards as regular education students, the equitable application of requirements to students with disabilities has been hampered by technicalities, such as fair assessment. Even if testing were not an issue, however, it is doubtful that the academic competencies being encouraged would be appropriate for the lives of all special education students.

An obvious contradiction in the current paradigm is that academic excellence is incompatible with the needs of large numbers of students in special education programs. While the reform movement is advocating higher academic standards, Will (1984) is trumpeting the agenda for better transitional services. She is equating the appropriateness of special education programs using a transition model with their success rate in student employment. However, preliminary data, such as that of Halpern (1985) indicate that economic indicators such as employment are too narrowly focused. Halpern believes that education's goals should be expanded to include independent living status and social relationship patterns. Caught in the middle of all this are special education personnel preparation programs, without identity, focus, or direction.

Thus, the question of excellence in education and, ultimately, outcomes for high school special education students, becomes entangled with the dispute over graduation requirements, types of diplomas, and the related issues of transitional programming and teacher preparation. A requisite to solving these contradictions and goal conflicts is to have the best possible understanding of current practices and trends in graduation policies and program practices in secondary special education. On one level this can be accomplished by studying perspectives and policies of state departments of education relative to these issues.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to create a data base of current state graduation policies and related program practices and to determine how these policies and program practices have been applied to high school special education students. Additionally, the study probed the opinions of state directors of special education regarding the importance and emphasis of current state policies. Finally, the data were used to develop recommendations for policy makers.

A survey instrument was developed to obtain the data base of interest from state education agencies. The survey had two parts. Section I of the survey was designed to determine how state directors of special education perceive the importance of current secondary special education program practices and to investigate the degree of emphasis states have placed on these program practices. Section II of the survey requested factual information about (a) states' policies for graduation from high school as they apply to special education students, (b) states' transitional programs and services, and (c) related teacher preparation programs.

Subjects

Section I subjects. In order to collect data from subjects who have comparable positions, special education directors of all 50 states and the District of Columbia were asked to complete this section of the survey themselves, rather than delegating it to someone on their staff.

Section II subjects. All directors of special education in the 50 states and the District of Columbia were given the option of completing Section II of the survey themselves or delegating it to someone on their staff. This procedure was used to encourage directors' responses by focusing on factual information with which staff would be familiar, and thus requiring less response time for the directors.

Data Collection Instruments.

The data collection instruments used in this study were developed by the senior author (Bodner, 1986) in collaboration with other authors as part of a comprehensive study of high school programs for handicapped youth in transition. Instruments included a written form for each section of the survey, as well as a telephone follow-up form of Section II of the questionnaire.

Development. A comprehensive review of the literature was conducted, including issues and trends in high school graduation requirements, minimum competency programs, the testing of minimum competencies, the application of these policies to special education students, the role of transitional services and programming in high school special education programs, and related teacher preparation. Additionally, researchers examined the survey instruments and procedures used in other national

studies, including studies on minimum competency testing (Galloway, 1979; Gambrell,1985; Schenk, 1981), a national survey of graduation requirements (Dyrenfurth, 1985), and a statewide survey of high school special education programs (Halpern & Benz, 1984).

The results of the literature review were developed into a written outline and topics judged to reflect particular significance were selected for inclusion in the questionnaire. A prototype of the questionnaire was pilot tested with state department personnel and higher education faculty and the resulting recommendations were included. The final draft of the questionnaire included Section I, addressing the perceived importance and emphasis of selected program practices, and Section II, targeting factual information about states' policies.

Telephone follow-up form. Section II of the questionnaire was written into a telephone follow-up interview form specifying the protocol to be used by interviewers (Dillman, 1978). This form was used to record data from both telephone follow-up interviews with non-responding states and reliability interviews.

Reliability. The reliability for the factual data requested in Section II of the questionnaire was checked by conducting a telephone interview with six states. Twelve states were selected at random and invited to participate in the reliability check. State directors of special education were sent a letter requesting their participation; a post card was included for the directors to use in designating a contact person.

The telephone interviews were conducted with six states that agreed to participate (Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Mississippi, New Mexico, and Texas). The results were compared with the written surveys from those states and agreements and disagreements were determined for each item. The number of agreements was added and divided by the number of agreements and disagreements and expressed as a percentage. Using this method, the reliability for Part A, Required Units for Graduation, was 91%; for Part B, Minimum Competency Programs, the reliability was 92%; Part C, Teacher Preparation, was 92%; Part D, Transitional Services, was 77%. The overall reliability for Section II of the survey instrument was 89%.

Procedures. State directors of special education were asked to respond to Section I of the questionnaire personally and were offered confidentiality. Directors were asked to identify a designee on their staff to complete Section II if they did not choose to respond themselves. A cover letter was developed explaining the purpose of the study and encouraging the subjects' responses. One letter was developed for state directors of special education who had designated a staff person to complete Section II, and a separate letter was developed for those directors who had not designated a staff person. A letter also was developed for the designees.

One week after the materials were mailed, all subjects were sent a letter encouraging them to complete the questionnaire and to call a member of the project staff if they had questions. This technique has been found to be effective in increasing the rate of response (Dillman, 1978). Two weeks after the letter reminder, a replacement packet was sent to subjects who had not yet returned their completed questionnaire. Subjects were encouraged to call with any questions or concerns. Five weeks after the first survey was mailed, project researchers contacted the directors of special education for those states that had not responded and requested a telephone interview. Contacts were repeated until responses were obtained for all fifty states and the District of Columbia.

Data Analysis

Returned questionnaires were checked for incomplete or ambiguous responses. The name of the person completing Section I was checked, and persons other than a director of special education were noted.

Factors influencing emphasis. In Section I of the questionnaire, directors of special education were asked to list the three factors that most influence the emphasis their state gives to high school special education program practices and to rank these three factors. In order to analyze these data, two researchers independently categorized the factors listed by each director. Disagreements on factors were discussed and the categories were changed if both raters agreed. If not, the factor was made into a separate category. A weighted average procedure was used to report the data.

Importance and emphasis of program practices. In Section I of the questionnaire, directors also were asked to indicate their perception of the importance of specified program practices, such as transitional services or noncategorical teacher preparation. They were instructed then to indicate the emphasis their state has placed on the program practice. Directors were asked to indicate a number from 0 to 100 that best described their perception of the importance or the degree of state emphasis. They were told that 100 represented the most important or the most emphasis. This method of magnitude scaling is thought to have definite advantages over category scaling (Lodge, 1981), since the researcher is not inadvertently affecting the subject's response by forcing an answer into a category. Also, more powerful statistical techniques may be used in analyzing the data than could be used with information generated through category scaling procedures.

Analysis. Data from Sections I and II of the questionnaires were coded and entered into the University of Kansas' Honeywell main frame computer. The analysis was completed using the SPSS-X (Norusis, 1983) software.

Results, Discussion, and Recommendations

Section I: Importance of Program Practice

The purpose of Section I was to determine how a group of professionals with comparable positions view the importance of selected program practices that relate to secondary special education services and programs and the degree of emphasis in implementation effort relative to those program practices. It was assumed that it would be of interest to policy-makers to know what state leadership believed to be of relative importance and what they would report regarding the amount of emphasis placed on these practices in their own states. State directors of special education were asked first to indicate their opinion of the importance of each of the program practices provided, and second, to indicate the emphasis their state has placed on those program practices. They were asked to respond as if a score of 100 was the most important (or the most emphasized) and to record a number from 0 to 100 to indicate their ranking.

Of the 51 directors surveyed, 35 responded to Section I of the survey regarding the importance and emphasis of state program practices. The relatively low response rate (69%) can be viewed in light of several factors that emerged over the course of the study. First, although the subjects were assured confidentiality, many of the issues addressd by the questions were very controversial, and frequently would have involved either a shift of responsibility for some educational planning from the state department of education to the legislature, or a change of regulations by the board of education. Secondly, some state staff persons reported that they receive a large number of surveys and cannot respond to all of them. Finally, the project staff requested that only the director respond, rather than delegate the survey to a staff member, even though the response rate might have been greater.

Table 1 illustrates the responses to Section I. For each program practice, the range between directors' answers was reported, as well as the mean response with the standard deviation. The median response also was included as a measure of central tendency because of the positive skew of the score distribution. The responses from the Section I questions indicated a great deal of variance among respondents' opinions of the importance of program practices. This conclusion was supported by the wide range of opinions expressed to researchers during follow-up telephone interviews to six states. Responses to several items ranged from 0 to 100 in importance, including all of the items in the teacher preparation category. Thus, while some respondents believed that these program practices were of significant importance, others indicated they were unimportant. Examples of items in which the respondents varied the least included the importance of state level transitional staff, instruction in transitional skills, differentiated curricula, and alternative graduation requirements.

The emphasis that states placed on program practices also varied. All of the items regarding minimum competency programs ranged from 0 to 100 in emphasis, with most items in the teacher preparation and transitional services categories also having a 100 point range.

Table 1

State Directors' Perceptions of the Importance and Emphasis of State Program Practices[1]

Program Practice	Importance			Emphasis		
	Range	Mean (Median)	Standard Deviation	Range	Mean (Median)	Standard Deviation
Program Outcomes:						
Vocational preparation	70	85 (85)	15	90	58 (60)	22
Alternatives for meeting graduation requirements	75	84 (90)	19	90	67 (70)	21
Transitional skills instruction	40	85 (85)	10	75	54 (50)	22
Type of diploma	80	78 (80)	21	90	65 (75)	25
Differentiated curricula	60	86 (90)	16	80	67 (75)	21
Teacher Preparation:						
Certification according to instructional level, e.g., secondary	100	72 (75)	24	100	51 (50)	33
Noncategorical certification	100	71 (80)	29	100	63 (75)	32
Interdisciplinary certification	100	62 (70)	30	100	37 (30)	30
Instructional area certification, e.g., English, Math	100	59 (70)	26	90	42 (50)	28
Required inservice on graduation requirements	100	66 (78)	30	85	36 (35)	26
Required inservice on instructional area, e.g., English, Math	100	70 (83)	27	100	47 (50)	28

[1] Data from 35 of 50 states

Table 1 (continued)

State Directors' Perceptions of the Importance and Emphasis of State Program Practices[1]

Program Practice	Importance			Emphasis		
	Range	Mean (Median)	Standard Deviation	Range	Mean (Median)	Standard Deviation
Transitional Services						
Formal interagency agreements	100	85 (95)	22	100	60 (65)	31
Informal interagency agreements	100	71 (83)	31	100	61 (65)	28
Joint program planning	100	81 (90)	27	100	48 (58)	37
State incentives for local interagency agreements	100	67 (75)	29	85	34 (30)	28
State level transitional staff	50	88 (90)	11	100	63 (75)	30
Minimal Competency Programs and Testing						
State policy for SPED students	100	79 (90)	26	100	58 (63)	36
Type of assessment	100	74 (80)	26	90	46 (50)	32
State policy for accommodations	100	81 (90)	27	100	60 (73)	36
Use of same criterion scores for regular and SPED students	100	51 (50)	31	100	41 (35)	33
General						
State policies and determining curriculum, graduation, and MCT for SPED students	100	70 (85)	34	100	52 (60)	34

[1] Data from 35 states of 50 states

Respondents' perceptions, which were reflected in the ratings, indicated that states are placing extremely different emphases on program practices.

The large variance in rankings in Section I indicated that further research is needed to make definite interpretations. For example, there may have been a treatment effect due to the questionnaire and response mode. From the data in this section, however, it could be concluded that the professionals studied, who have comparable positions, varied among themselves in their perceptions of the importance of certain program practices that affect secondary special education services and programs. As depicted in Table 2, the six program practices with the highest median ratings included four items related to transitional services. These scores indicated that state directors, as a group, believe that transition issues are more important than issues in other categories. Teacher education faculties will note with some concern, no doubt, the lowest median ratings included three items related to teacher training. Finally, the median importance rating for using the same criterion or cutoff score in minimum competency for regular and special education students was noticeably lower than the others.

Table 3 indicated that state directors, as a group, considered that the four program practices with the greatest emphasis ratings were also given equal emphasis across the states, i.e., each of the four program practices had a median rating of 75. Directors were also asked to identify those factors which had the greatest influence on what program practices were emphasized. The directors were instructed to assign a rank from 1 to 3 for each influencing factor they named. A weighted average was then determined for each factor. The weighted average was obtained by multiplying the frequency for a rank by the ranked value (either a 1, 2 or 3), and then adding. The 11 most frequently mentioned factors are listed in Table 4. Two raters categorized the factors independently and then compared categories. Disagreements were examined and collapsed into existing categories if both raters agreed. If not, a new category was created.

Table 2

Median Importance of Program Practices
as Rated by State Directors of Special Education

Program Practice	Median[1]
Greatest Importance	
Formal Interagency Agreements	95
Joint Program Planning	90
State Level Transitional Staff	90
State Policy for Allowances in Minimum Competency Tests	90
Differentiated Curricula	90
Alternatives for Meeting Graduation Requirements	90
Least Importance	
State Incentives for Local Interagency Agreements	75
Certification According to Instructional Level, e.g. secondary	75
Instructional Area Certification	70
Interdisciplinary Certification	70
Same Criterion Scores used for SPED Students	50

[1]Refers to directors' ratings of program practices from 0 to100.

Table 3

Median Emphases of Program Practices
as Rated by State Directors of Special Education

Program Practice	Median[1]
Greatest Emphasis	
State level transition staff	75
Type of diploma	75
Noncategorical certification	75
Differentiated curricula	75
Least Emphasis	
Required in-service on graduation requirements	35
Interdisciplinary certification	30
State incentives for local interagency agreements	30

[1]Based on rating scale of 0 to 100.

Table 4

Factors Identified by State Directors of Special Education As Influencing the Emphasis Given to State Level Program Practices

Factor	Weighted Average[1]
Money	23
Political Priorities	21
Students' Needs	16
Local District Priorities	14
State Board of Education	14
Administrators' Priorities	13
Department of Education	11
Existing Graduation Policies	10
Teachers' Priorities	8
Parental Priorities	8
Teacher Training	5

[1]Frequencies first were tabulated by their rank and then multiplied by the weight of the rank and added.

In reviewing the data on factors influencing program emphases, interpretation was difficult. For example, the issue of money could be interpreted to mean funding, budget constraints, or any number of other related factors. While it might not be surprising that the factors reported as most influential on state program practices were money and political priorities, it perhaps was more significant that among these relative rankings, factors related to parental priorities, teachers' priorities, and teacher training had the least influence.

Section II: Description of Program Practices

The purposes of Section II were to create an informational overview of state graduation policies currently in effect, to identify ways in which states apply these policies to special education students, and to categorize the policies when possible.

Regular units for graduation. Survey results indicated that nearly half of the states (47.9%) had new policies on required number of units for graduation. In most instances these changes were being or had been phased in over several years. Further analyses indicated potential influences of these changes on special education programs and, most importantly, on students.

Forty-six states reported that they prescribe the academic subjects of English or language arts, math, science, or social science in meeting total unit requirements. These subjects are displayed in Figures 1-4. According to these data, most states require four units of English or language arts, three of math, two of science, and three of social science. Perhaps more importantly, a total of 36 states had increased their requirements. Seventy-two percent of the states reported increases in math, 65% in science, 41% in English or language arts, and 30% in social science. This number (36) was slightly less than the 40 states that Dyrenfruth (1985) identified as having approved increases or were considering implementing increases in math, science, and English.

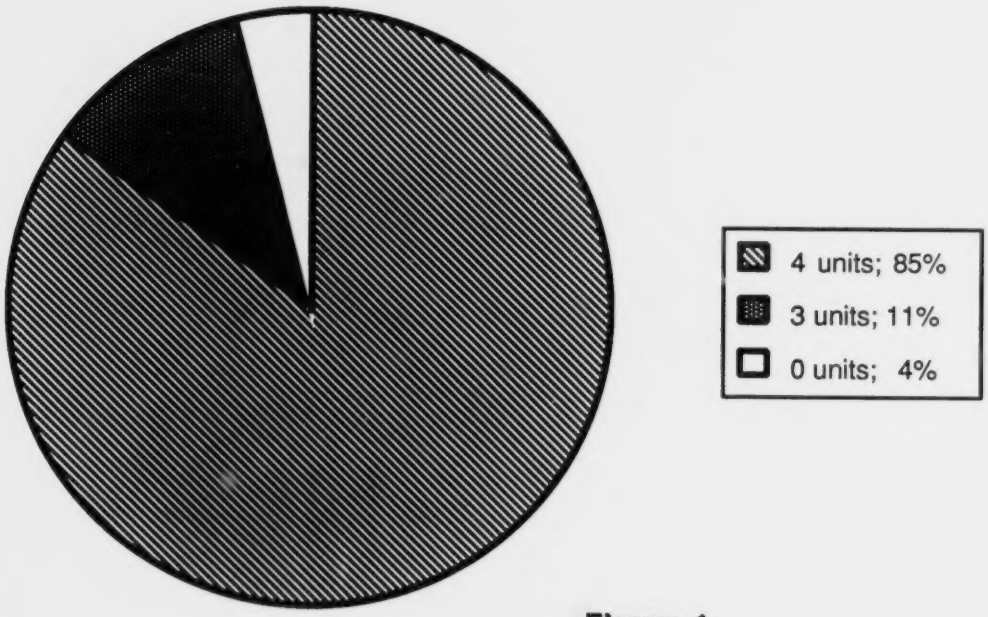

Figure 1.
Minimum English units required for graduation (percentage of states)

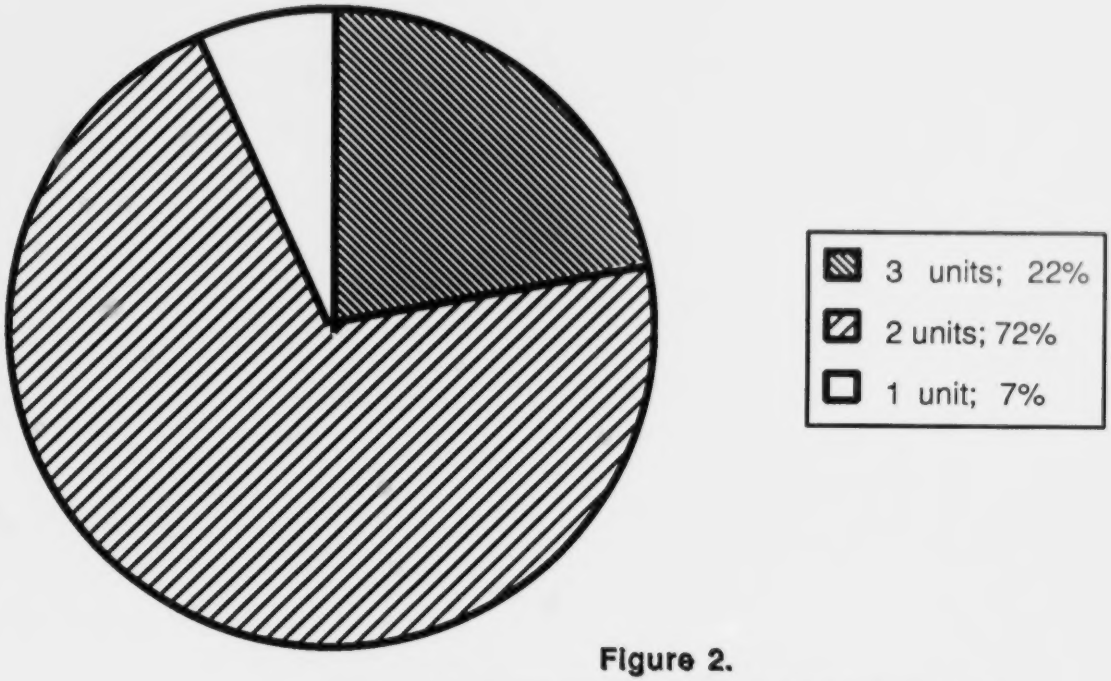

Figure 2.
Minimum math units required for graduation (percentage of states)

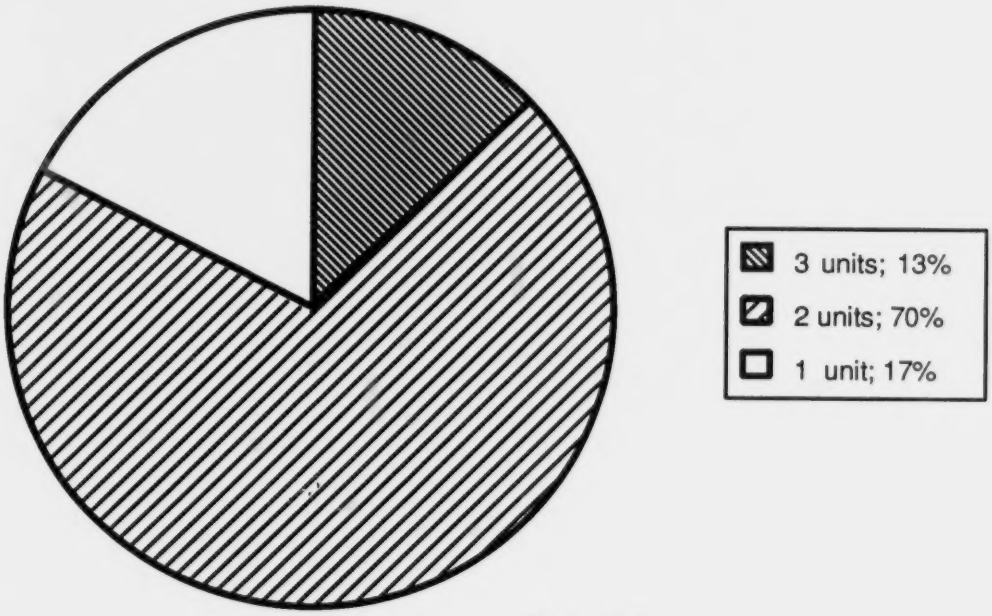

Figure 3.
Minimum science units required for graduation
(percentage of states)

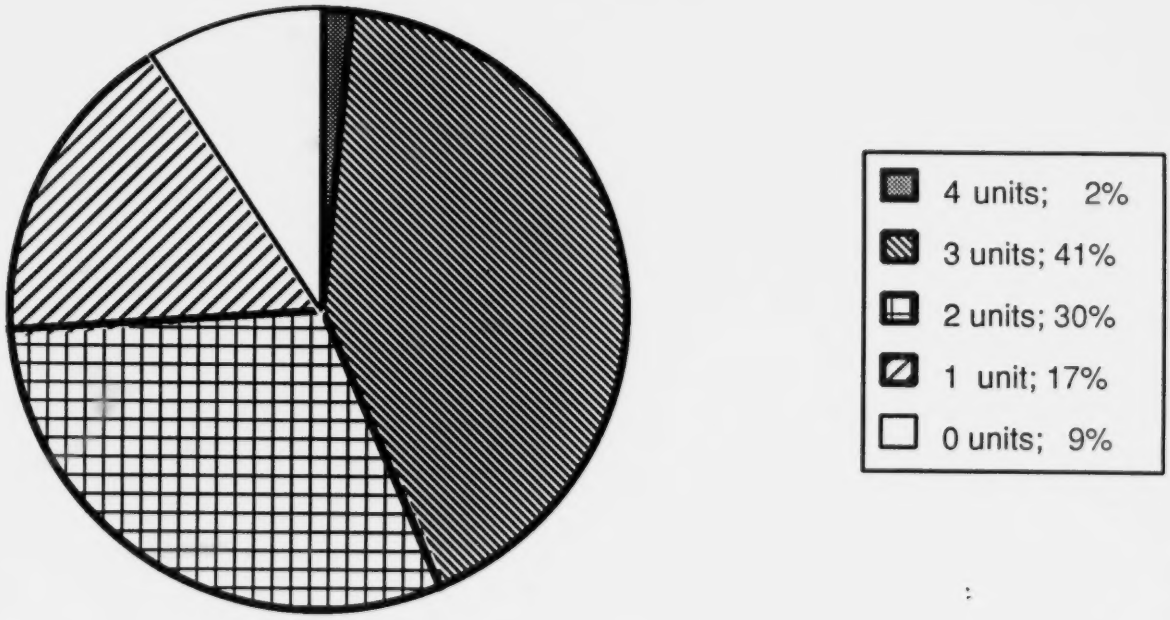

Figure 4.
Minimum social science units required for graduation.
(percentage of states)

Several considerations for special education students emerged in the trend for increased academic requirements. First, the increases that were reported had occurred since 1975, with most changes initiated in the early to middle 1980s. These increases, then, occurred during the time that Public Law 94-142 was reaching its greatest level of implementation. Since the effect of 94-142 was increased participation in the regular, or mainstreamed, program for many high school special education students, the data from this study suggest that these students may have encountered programs with an increasing academic emphasis. Additionally, almost one-half of the states that had increased their academic requirements indicated that these policies were not completely implemented yet. Thus, the full effects for special education students are unknown at this time.

Allowances in graduation requirements. In order to probe the efforts that states have initiated to make the regular curriculum appropriate for special education students, state department respondents were asked to indicate allowances that are made within the state level minimum unit requirements. Thirty-six states reported that they had specific allowances in their respective state level policies. The results are listed in Table 5. While all states reporting policy allowances provided support services within regular classes, and many allowed modified content or modified instruction, only 19 states reported allowing special education students to take classes with different content and instruction as a means of meeting graduation requirements. The remaining states (17) reported that the decision regarding allowances is delegated to local districts.

Exit Documents. High school programming has focused on different outcomes throughout our country's history. At one time or another, these outcomes have focused on literacy, citizenship, job preparation, and college readiness. Thus, the diploma has signified the successful completion of graduation requirements that are based on curricular programs that reflect these outcomes.

Table 5

Allowances in Meeting Graduation Requirements
for Special Education Students

Allowance[1]	States Frequency/%
States Specifying Allowances	36/51 (71%)
Types of Allowances:	
1. Regular classes with support services; no modifications	36/36 (100%)
2. Classes with same subject title; modified content	30/36 (83%)
3. Classes with same subject title; modified instruction	35/36 (97%)
4. Classes with same subject title; different content and modified instruction	19/36 (53%)

[1]Refers to states (36) that specified what allowances are made. Number of responses was not limited.

In the past, local school districts have determined their own programs of study and graduation requirements for a diploma. In recent years, however, state governments have assumed this role more frequently. This change is largely an attempt to provide more equitable educational opportunities for minority students (Crouse, 1986). As a consequence, state governments have disagreed about the proper document to recognize the completion of individualized criteria or individualized content, as is the case with some special education students.

Seventeen states, as indicated in Table 6, reported that state policy requires that different exit documents other than a regular diploma be awarded to special education students who do not meet regular graduation requirements. Fourteen states reported that state policy requires that one exit document be awarded to all students, whether they meet regular or alternate requirements, and that this document is the regular diploma. Nineteen states reported that the decision regarding exit documents is not determined by state policy, but is delegated to local districts.

Of the 17 states that differentiate exit documents, nine states award a special education or modified diploma to special education students who meet alternate requirements rather than requirements for a regular diploma. This represents an increase from the one state found by Galloway (1979) and the four states identified by Schenk (1981) that award special education diplomas. Another eight states award a certificate of some type to students who do not meet the requirements for a regular diploma. It should be noted that 100% of the states that differentiate exit documents also reported that the regular diploma is available to special education students who meet regular education graduation requirements.

Minimum competency tests. Recent research has demonstrated that some of the original concerns regarding minimum competency testing may not have materialized. Whereas early studies in the 1970s indicated that many states were planning to implement minimum competency programs, Gambrell (1985) determined that the movement appears to have stabilized within the last five years, at least in the area of reading. Data from the current study appear to confirm Gambrell's findings.

Table 6

State Policies for Exit Documents[1]

Exit Document Determined By:	Number of States
Local District or Interpretation of Policy	19/50 (38%)
State Education Agency Policy	31/50 (62%)
Of these 3l states:	
A. Require one document (diploma)[2]	14/31 (45%)
B. Require two documents:	17/31 (55%)
Of the 17 states with 2 documents:	
1. Require two diplomas[3]	9/17 (53%)
2. Require diploma and certificate[4]	8/17 (47%)

[1]Does not include the District of Columbia.

[2]States that award a regular diploma to special education students who meet regular graduation requirements, as well as those who do not.

[3]States that award a regular diploma to those students who meet regular requirements and a different diploma to those who do not.

[4]States that award a regular diploma to those students who meet regular requirements and a certificate to those who do not.

In order to determine which states require a minimum competency test for high school graduation, subjects first were asked whether they have a minimum competency program. They then were asked whether they use a test to assess minimum competency, and, if so, how the test is used. Thirty states responded that they have a minimum competency program, a number only slightly different from the 29 states with minimum competency testing in reading found by Gambrell (1985).

As an added note, it was determined that 25 of the 30 states with minimum competency programs (83%) had also increased their unit requirements for graduation within the past ten years. This fact lends some support to the data from Evans' (1985) study that attributes the rise of unit requirements in California to minimum competency legislation.

As Table 7 indicates, 23 states reported that they use a written test to assess competency. Of those 23 states requiring a test, state policy specifies the test in 21 states, and the local district decides the test in two states. Of the states requiring a test, 21 states reported that it is required for graduation. Several of these responses probably meant that the state merely requires students to take the test prior to graduation, not that graduation is denied based on performance. This interpretation seems likely because the data in Table 8 indicate that 15 states use the test score to determine the type of exit document, a figure that corresponds to the 15 states found by Gambrell (1985) that link minimum competency to graduation. Two other alternative uses of the test are: (a) a basis for promotion, and (b) to indicate need for participation in a remediation program.

Finally, subjects were asked to indicate how their state's policy for minimum competence is applied to special education students. Responses are presented in Table 8. Of the states that had a minimum competency test, 22 (96%) reported that they also had a specific policy regulating the participation of special education students. Of these, 82% reported that provisions for special education students are decided through the IEP process. The provisions cited most often were individual or small group test administration (86%), extended time (82%), and administration by the

Table 7

Policies in States
Requiring Minimum Competency Tests[1]

Characteristics of Policies	Number of States
States Using Written Minimum Competency Tests	23/30 (77%)
State specifies test	21/23 (91%)
District specifies test	2/23 (9%)
Uses of Written Minimum Competency Tests	
Required for graduation	21/23 (91%)
Required for promotion	3/23 (31%)
Diagnosis and remediation	11/23 (48%)
States Using Minimum Competency Assessment other than Written Tests	7/30 (23%)

[1]Refers to the 30 (60%) states that reported having a policy on minimal competency programs.

Table 8

State Policies
Regulating the Participation of Special
Education Students in Minimum Competency Tests[1]

Policy Characteristics	Number of States
Policy Provisions:[2]	
1. Type of Exit Documents Determined by Test Score	15/22 (68%)
2. Provision for Exemption of Special Education Students:	
Decided on case-by-case basis e.g., IEP	18/22 (82%)
Decided by category of disability, SPED designation, or other	4/22 (18%)
3. Provision for Test Administration:[3]	
Test given individually or in in small groups	19/22 (86%)
Extend time	18/22 (82%)
Separate test directions	11/22 (50%)
Student's instructional reading level used	4/22 (18%)
Test administered by special education teacher	14/22 (64%)

[1]Refers to states (23) that report requiring a written test.

[2]Refers to states (22) that report having a specific policy for special education students.

[3]Number of answers not limited.

special education teacher (64%). This information provided an indication of the accommodations that are made for special education students in taking minimum competency tests as a graduation requirement. Several states had very specific policy statements regarding the exclusion of special education students' scores from norms or published data on the tests.

Teacher certification. The issues of teacher certification and graduation requirements for special education students are related in at least two particular ways. First, it generally is recognized that secondary teachers should be trained both at the level and in the area(s) that they will teach. For this reason, Clark (1984) argued that the differences between high school and elementary special education are significant enough to warrant differentiated teacher training and certification. Although there is an apparent increase in the frequency of differentiation, it is still not the predominant mode. This stance by teacher education programs may affect, then, the nature of high school programs. Deshler and Schumaker (1986) supported Clark's position and commented that current practices may violate standards of professional ethics. They referred to the fact that special education teachers often teach specific content areas (e.g., sciences, history, language arts, mathematics, etc.) even though they are not certified in those areas. Lacking the appropriate certification credentials contradicts the notion of professional standards and undermines efficacy of special education. Secondly, Bursuck and Epstein (1986) indicated that the curriculum of teacher education programs is more oriented towards high school programming in those states that require a secondary certificate for high school special education teachers. Thus, a state's certification policy, based on an educational philosophy that suggests that secondary teachers do not need specialized training, apparently affects the focus of teacher training programs.

Table 9 depicts the responses from the current study regarding the types of teacher certification required by various states. Although 48 states (94%) reported that they require certification in special education, only 13 states (25%) indicated that certification in secondary special education is required for high school teachers, a number slightly different from the 14 determined by Bursuck and Epstein (1986). Of these 13 states,

Table 9

State Policies for High School
Special Education Teacher Certification

Certification Required[1]	Number of States
Special Education	48/51 (94%)
Regular Secondary and Special Education	8/51 (16%)
Secondary Special Education	13/51 (25%)
Of those 13 states requiring secondary special education certification, other differentiations include:[2]	
Categorical disability	9/13 (69%)
Noncategorical or interrelated	2/13 (15%)
Functional academics	1/13 (8%)
Interdisciplinary	4/13 (31%)
Instructional area of emphasis	5/13 (38%)
Combination	2/13 (15%)

[1]Refers to all states and Washington, D.C.

[2]Number of answers not limited.

most reported several areas of certification differentiation, with categorical certification cited by 9 states (69%). Additionally, eight states (16%) reported requiring certification in regular secondary education, as well as special education. Further research should determine the unique characteristics of these policies in order to distinguish among them. In addition, further research should determine whether the fact that three states reported that special education certification is not required is a reporting error or due to interpretation of the survey question.

Transitional programming. The trend within special education toward transitional programming requires attention to the available services as well as the curricular offerings. Special educators have recognized the wide array of services within the adult service delivery system and the lack of centralized coordination of these services. Halpern (1985) identified mechanisms, or linkages, that might be used to describe transitional services. These mechanisms are considered important in integrating high school special education students into community services and programs after they graduate.

To determine the nature of state level policies for transition, respondents were asked to indicate the types of mechanisms provided by state policy. Forty-seven states, as shown in Table 10, reported having some type of mechanism, with formal agreements with Vocational Rehabilitation and Vocational Education cited most often, 77% and 64% respectively. Fourteen states reported that state level mechanisms are being developed. Future research should define the mechanisms more clearly and examine the policy provisions needed to make accurate comparisons of state level transition mechanisms.

To determine how much staff time is specifically allocated to implementing transitional programs and services, states were asked to indicate staff responsibilities. Thirty-nine states reported having a staff person with specific responsibilities for transitional programs and

Table 10

State Level Mechanisms
for Transitional Services

	States Currently with Policies[1]	States Developing Policies[2]
Formal Agreement, Vocational Education	30/47 (64%)	3/14 (21%)
Informal Agreement, Vocational Education	17/47 (36%)	1/14 (7%)
Formal Agreement, Vocational Rehabilitation	36/47 (77%)	3/14 (21%)
Informal Agreement, Vocational Rehabilitation	15/47 (32%)	1/14 (7%)
Formal Agreement, Other Agencies	15/47 (32%)	6/14 (43%)
Informal Agreement, Other Agencies	17/47 (36%)	3/14 (21%)
Statewide Information Sharing	16/47 (34%)	4/14 (29%)
Joint Program Planning	16/47 (34%)	7/14 (50%)

[1]Refers to the states and District of Columbia (47) that reported having current state level mechanisms to assist in transition.

[2]Refers to the states (14) that reported they are developing a policy.

services. The mean percentage state level special education staff time spent on transition was 49% and the median was 40%. It should be noted that although 9 states reported a 100%-time transitional staff person, some of these positions were funded through grants, and continuation of the positions was unknown. An appropriate follow-up would be to determine what the staff members' other responsibilities include, how those responsibilities relate or do not relate to transitional services and how they actually spend their time.

Incentives for districts. In addition to state level mechanisms for transition, states also were requested to indicate what incentives they offer to local districts to collaborate with other agencies. As illustrated in Table 11, most of the 32 states that reported incentives specify that they offer technical assistance (84%) and staff in-service (69%) as their incentives. Only 7 states reported that they have fiscal incentives and three states reported that fiscal incentives are developing. It is important to note that the meaning of the term "incentives" could have been interpreted differently by different states and further examination of the specific policy provisions is needed. For example, one state might consider incentives to be only financial in nature, while another state might see in-service training to be a state agency contribution as an incentive. Without a definition or a set of examples, states used their own definitions of what constituted an incentive to collaborate. Similarly, there is value in knowing the details of the technical assistance and in-service training that is provided local education agencies.

Graduation Policy Options

Over the course of this study, several major differences emerged regarding the exit documents awarded to special education students. First, it became apparent that while some states require special education students to meet the standards of the regular academic program to receive the regular diploma, others allow special education students to pursue alternate standards or a different curriculum and yet receive a

Table 11

State Incentives for Local Interagency Collaboration
for Transitional Services

Incentives	States with Incentives[1]	States Developing Incentives[2]
Policy Specifying Local Interagency Delivery System	10/32 (31%)	3/8 (38%)
Technical Assistance	27/32 (84%)	2/8 (25%)
Staff In-Service	22/32 (69%)	2/8 (25%)
Fiscal Incentives	7/32 (22%)	3/8 (38%)

[1]Refers to the states (32) that reported having current state level incentives to encourage local interagency collaboration.

[2]Refers to the states (8) that reported they are in the process of developing incentives.

regular diploma. Second, the controversy over exit documents appeared to be embedded within the trend towards increasing state control and decreasing local district control over graduation requirements. To examine these issues further, states first were divided into two policy options based on whether exit documents for special education were determined by state or local policy. States in the state policy group were then further divided into three subgroups, based on the type of exit documents awarded to special education students who meet alternate graduation requirements rather than regular requirements. In general, the uses of alternate graduation requirements can be described by the following outline:

1. Alternate graduation requirements that are based on the regular curriculum, i.e., modifications of regular requirements
   a. Alternative requirements individually determined in the IEP process
   b. Alternative requirements predetermined for an entire group

2. Alternate graduation requirements that are based on a different curriculum than the regular curriculum
   a. Alternative requirements individually determined in the IEP process
   b. Alternative requirements predetermined for an entire group

Superimposed across these graduation requirement alternatives, were the various state policies for controlling graduation requirement alternatives. Four policy options emerged, three with state level control policies and one that represents states that allow local districts ultimately to make the decision about the type of exit document special education students will receive. These four policy options were:

Policy A: Special education students will receive a certificate if they do not meet regular graduation requirements or if they meet alternate requirements.

Policy B: Special education students will receive a special or modified diploma if they met alternate requirements.

Policy C: Special education students will receive a regular diploma upon satisfactory completion of regular or alternative graduation requirements.

Policy D: Local school districts may decide what type of exit document will be awarded to students who meet alternate graduation requirements, even though there may be state guidelines.

The investigators examined state policy documents when possible and conducted follow-up telephone calls to state department of education personnel to obtain further information. A summary of each policy was developed that included a description of exit documents specified by the various state policies and a list of policy variations among states. Finally, policy options were compared on selected characteristics from Section II of the survey.

Policy A

Description. The nine states reporting this policy were characterized by a state level policy that requires districts to award a regular diploma to special education students who meet all regular graduation requirements and a certificate to those who do not. Thus, any students who have been identified as needing special services under an IEP and who meet all regular graduation requirements must receive a regular diploma. Students who meet attendance requirements, but who do not meet graduation credit requirements and/or minimum competency test requirements, must receive an attendance certificate or certificate of completion. Those states among the nine reporting this policy that provide alternate graduation requirements may award special education students who meet those requirements an "IEP certificate" or its equivalent.

Policy variations. The following are examples of variations among the state level policies in this policy option approach:

1. State policy allows districts to decide what type of certificates to give special education students, and the certificate may be different from that given to regular students who do not meet minimum proficiency or other graduation requirements.

2. State policy requires that districts not identify certificates given to special education students as being different. That is, during graduation ceremonies no distinctions are made.

3. Special education students who have individualized graduation requirements in their IEPs that deviate from standard requirements must receive an IEP certificate, rather than a diploma.

4. State policy specifies the number of total units or credits required for a regular diploma, but districts decide whether or not the units may be taken in special education classes. If the units may be taken in special education classes and they are satisfactorily completed, the students receive a regular diploma. If students are not permitted to take the units in a special class and do not satisfactorily pass regular class units, or if they fail special class units that have been allowed, they receive a certificate.

5. Districts submit courses to the state department of education for approval that special education students may take to meet unit requirements. Satisfactory completion leads to a regular diploma, failure to pass these leads to a certificate.

6. State policy specifies the number of hours per day a student may participate in special education classes or resource rooms and still receive a regular diploma.

7. Students must be identified and placed under special services through an IEP in order for special classes to count toward a regular diploma. This policy prohibits a student (an athlete, for example) from being placed in a resource room or special class course offering without an IEP process simply for the lowered academic demands.

8. Special education students must take the minimum competency test and meet the same level of proficiency as non-special education students in order to receive a regular diploma. Failure to pass the exam leads to the awarding a certificate rather than a diploma.

Policy B

Description. Like Policy A, the eight states in Option B require that districts award a regular diploma to special education students who meet all regular graduation requirements. Alternate graduation requirements are provided, however, and special education students who meet these requirements are awarded a special or modified diploma rather than a certificate of attendance or certificate of completion. Students who do not meet alternate requirements may receive an attendance certificate or its equivalent in some of these eight states.

Policy variations. The following variations in policy implementation were reported for this policy option approach:

1. State policy prescribes the requirements for a regular diploma and specifies that a special diploma must be given to special education students who do not qualify, but local districts may decide what to call the diploma.

2. The state specifies an alternate curriculum, e.g. life skills or vocational, that leads to a special education diploma.

3. State policy requires that the requirements for a special education diploma be specified in the student's IEP.

4. State policy requires a special diploma, but local districts decide the curriculum and requirements.

5. State policy sets the minimum units required for both a special as well as a regular diploma.

6. State policy sets the requirements for a regular diploma, but allows districts to set requirements for a special diploma.

7. State policy specifies which classes and the degree of help allowed for special education students in meeting unit requirements. Deviation from these policy specifications results in a student being awarded a special diploma.

8. State delegates to local districts the decision regarding which special education classes will be allowed to satisfy regular graduation requirements.

9. State policy sets one minimum competency score for a regular diploma and another for a special diploma.

10. Special education students who do not meet requirements for either regular or special diplomas may receive a certificate.

Policy C

Description. There were 14 states that have policies that allow districts to award only one exit document for regular and special education students, regardless of whether they meet regular, modified, or alternative graduation requirements. Thus, all special education students are awarded a regular diploma upon satisfactory completion of their individualized program, rather than a special diploma or a certificate.

Policy variations. Examples of policy implementation variations for this approach among states include:

1. State policy requires one diploma, and local districts may set alternative graduation requirements for special education students.

2. State requires that special education students pursue an approved course of study, but this may include individualized graduation requirements leading to a regular diploma.

3. State policy specifies adjustments that will be made in the level of mastery and/or content for special education students.

4. State policy requires accommodations and unit allowances to be specified in the IEP.

5. State policy specifies the special education classes and levels of help allowed.

6. State policy delegates the decision regarding unit allowances to local districts.

7. No state policy for minimum proficiency for a regular diploma, although there might be a minimum competency test.

8. State policy may allow districts to have a minimum proficiency score for a diploma, but special education students must be exempt.

9. State policy specifies a minimum proficiency score for a diploma, but special students may be exempt from all or part of the exam.

10. Districts may issue a transcript with competency level indicated or competency levels may be noted on the diploma for all students.

11. All students receive a regular diploma, but the state puts a disclaimer in the diploma stating that the diploma recognizes the completion of an approved program only; it does not represent the content of the regular high school program.

Policy D

Description. This option included the 19 states that allow local districts to decide what exit documents to award to special education students who do not meet regular graduation requirements. This was an extremely difficult option to categorize because of real and apparent contradicitions in policy statements. For example, while a state might have an official policy statement much like Policy Options A, B, and C, it might include a qualifier that the policy ultimately is up to the districts. Thus, if a state permitted local districts to override a state policy, it was placed in the local district options (Policy D).

Policy variations. States using this policy report the following examples of variation:

1. State policy specifies that there may be only one diploma, the regular diploma, but districts may give special education students a certificate instead.

2. Districts may decide between one diploma, two diplomas, and/or certificates for special education students.

3. State policy puts limits on when a district may give a certificate, e.g., only when the handicap is so severe that alternate appropriate requirements cannot be designed.

4. Districts may develop a non-diploma program for certain categories of special education students.

5. State policy specifies that special education students must receive a diploma, but districts may decide whether to give a regular or special diploma.

6. State policy requires districts to develop graduation requirements for special education students who do not pursue regular state unit requirements.

7. State specifies the special education classes and levels of help allowed in meeting unit requirements, but local districts decide the exit document.

8. No state policy for minimum competence for graduation.

9. State policy requires a minimum proficiency score on a test and requires districts to set one criteria for a regular diploma and one for a special diploma.

10. State policy requires those special education students who pursue a regular curriculum to take the minimum competency test. The consequence of failure, then, is left to the local district to decide.

11. No state minimum competency performance criterion, but districts may have a test with their own sets of criteria for regular and/or special diplomas and certificates.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations should be noted with respect to this study. First, it was unclear why 16 states did not respond to Section I of the survey. Quite possibly the sensitive and controversial nature of some of the issues was threatening. This confidentiality issue could have contributed to the non-response as well as biased the results obtained from those who did respond. Additionally, it was not possible to confirm that each response to the first section of the questionnaire was actually completed by the state director of special education, rather than a designee. Thus, the data may not be representative of state directors only.

Second, there is a unbelievably wide array of practices in developing and implementing graduation and diploma policies among states. As a result of this diversity, the survey instrument was not sensitive enough to detect the exact nature of some states' policies in Section II. Also, it is possible that some states interpreted questions differently than other states. This factor may not have been detected in the reliability check since two staff persons from the same state might have agreed on the interpretation. While subsequent telephone calls and examinations of policy documents corrected some data, the possibility of different interpretations remains.

Recommendations

The heart of the issue surrounding graduation requirements for high school special education students is the perceived conflict between equal opportunity and appropriate education. In order for special education students to receive the regular diploma that will provide more equality in opportunity after graduation, they sometimes have had to participate in a program that is not appropriate to their adult life goals. On the other hand, the decision to pursue a more appropriate program often has meant the receipt of a special diploma or a certificate that signifies more their failure to get a real diploma than their completion of a legitimate, appropriate course of study. The following considerations are recommended for policy makers and special educators involved in developing policies that balance these concerns.

Graduation Requirements

1. State legislatures and state and local boards of education should address the needs of special education students who are affected by state level policies that increase academic graduation requirements for all students. Policy makers should evaluate specifically the impact of these policies on special education students within their states. The formation of study groups to investigate and report on these and correlated policies is appropriate action.

2. Special educators should join forces with other disciplines that have expressed concerns about the increasingly stringent academic emphasis of graduation requirements, e.g., vocational education (Ferqueron, 1984), and business education (Byrnside, 1985). An alternative is to encourage the inclusion of functional, life-related curricula within graduation requirements. If a serious challenge were made of the genuine equivalency of current course of study options (college preparatory, vocational education, and general education), all of which lead to the same diploma, the issues of the current inequities in graduation requirements would be laid bare.

3. Special educators should provide leadership in advocating for more individualization in curricula, instruction, and performance criteria within policies for graduation requirements. These accommodations should be rigorously applied to ensure credibility of individualization. One could argue that, in fact, it is the failure to address the needs of individual students in both regular and special classrooms that has resulted in lower achievement and less than acceptable adult outcomes of many leaving the school system.

Policies for Exit Documents

1. Policy makers in state legislatures or state or local school boards who determine state exit documents should ensure that these documents provide high school special education students with equitable opportunities for postsecondary education or employment. Terminology and/or course of study descriptors should be positive and reflect a commitment of the school system to the value and integrity of any approved program successfully completed.

2. In determining which special education students should be awarded the regular diploma, policy makers should observe the following decision points:

A. Determine what specific outcome(s) a diploma represents, e.g., literacy, life preparation, job preparation, college readiness, etc., in order to develop a policy that provides an equitable exit document for all students.

B. Decide what modifications or accommodations will be made for special education students in meeting regular requirements, e.g., whether students may pursue individualized graduation requirements specified in their IEPs and whether students may pursue different requirements based on different content.

C. Determine the level of government that will regulate the policy and ensure that proper implementation and enforcement are possible.

3. In developing policies for differentiated exit documents, the Model Statute prepared by the Council for Exceptional Children for the American Bar Association (Policy Research Center, 1977) should be followed:

> No variation in the format or content of any diploma (certificate) awarded by the agency or school district to any exceptional person may exist unless: (1) The district offers to non-exceptional persons more than one type of diploma (certificate) and the format or content of each is determined by a program that has a significantly different curriculum than that of other programs in which other students in the district are enrolled; and (2) the curriculum of the program in which the person was enrolled differs significantly from that of other programs in which other students in the district are enrolled (p. 7).

Referring back to the first option in the outline of alternative graduation requirements (p. 42), adherence to the Model Statute would mean that special education students who meet individually determined or

predetermined alternative graduation requirements that are based on regular curriculum content would be awarded a regular diploma. Special education students would be awarded a different diploma only if they meet individually determined or predetermined graduation requirements that are based on different curriculum content, and only if a different curriculum with a different diploma is also offered to non-special education students.

Certificates should not be used to recognize the completion of alternative graduation requirements, whether they represent the regular curriculum or a different curriculum, unless the same certificate is awarded to non-special education students in the same circumstances. That is, an attendance certificate should be awarded to special education students who meet attendance requirements, but not unit and/or competency requirements, if such a certificate also is awarded to non-special education students who do not meet all regular or alternative graduation requirements. Currently, there would be no basis within the Model Statute guidelines for special markings or notations on regular diplomas, for justifying an appropriate name for a special diploma, or for what has been termed as a "modified" regular diploma by some states. It is clear that the Model Statute has not had a major impact on state policies in this area.

4. Advocates for special education students, particularly parents, as well as special education students themselves, should become informed of the possible consequences of differentiated diplomas and certificates and work to ensure individualized curricula as well as instruction in meeting regular graduation requirements.

Transitional Programming

1. Formal and informal interagency agreements should be developed at the state level to emphasize the importance of cooperation between special education personnel and adult service delivery providers in providing continued opportunities for successful life adjustments for special education students leaving high school. Also, state agencies should advocate for funds to provide financial and other strong incentives to local agencies for developing local interagency agreements.

2. Transitional programming should not be limited to transitional services but should include the instruction of transition skills that will enable students to be more independent after high school. Students should have transitional goals specified in their IEPs beginning at an early age and continuing through high school.

Teacher Preparation

1. States should develop a positive stance on the value of quality training and certification of secondary special education personnel. Some specific recommendations include the following:

A. States should designate at least one teacher education program within the state as a center for training secondary special education personnel.

B. Differentiated certification or endorsement should be developed to reflect differentiated training needs among secondary personnel.

C. State education agency program approval procedures for personnel preparation programs and the National Council for Accreditation in Teacher Education should specify differentiated standards for elementary and secondary special education personnel.

D. Categorical, non-categorical, and interrelated teacher training programs should all prepare secondary level teachers to function in a variety of curriculum models, e.g., prevocational, work experience, learning strategies, and remedial/adaptive.

E. Professional preparation of secondary special education responsibilities should be shared by regular education, special education, vocational education, and vocational rehabilitation.

2. High school special education teachers who are responsible for supporting the programs of students working toward regular graduation requirements should participate in in-service education on any subject matter they teach pertinent to those requirements.

Concluding Statement

The results of this study indicate that the issue of graduation requirements could continue to affect special education students in the future. Since most states have increased their academic graduation requirements, the high school curriculum probably will retain its academic focus, thus making it inappropriate for the adult lives of some special education students. Additionally, more states appear to be awarding differentiated exit documents to special education students who do not meet regular graduation requirements. Since many of these changes in graduation requirements and changes in exit documents are not fully implemented yet, special educators need to work with state and local policy makers to develop policies for graduation requirements, exit documents, transitional programming, and teacher preparation that will provide appropriate educational experiences for high school special education students, while protecting their rights to equal opportunity as adults.

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